

The Honorable Robert J. Bryan

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT TACOMA

UGOCHUKWU GOODLUCK
NWAUZOR, FERNANDO AGUIRRE-
URBINA, individually and on behalf of all
those similarly situated,

Plaintiffs.

V.

THE GEO GROUP, INC., a Florida corporation,

Defendant.

No. 17-cv-05769-RJB

REPLY IN SUPPORT OF
PLAINTIFFS' MOTION FOR
CLASS CERTIFICATION

I. INTRODUCTION

The parties have filed cross motions concerning class certification, and Plaintiffs have already addressed many of GEO’s arguments against class treatment in their recently filed opposition to Defendant’s motion to deny class certification. *See* Dkt. Nos. 69 (Def.’s Mot. to Deny Class Cert.), 86 (Pltfs.’ Mot. to Cert. Class), and 94 (Pltfs.’ Opp. to Def.’s Mot. to Deny Class Cert.). Because GEO’s opposition to the instant motion raises little in the way of new arguments or authority—certainly, none that are compelling—Plaintiffs forgo a tit-for-tat rebuttal and incorporate their earlier briefing by reference.¹ Several issues raised by GEO’s opposition, however, merit special attention, which Plaintiffs address below.

II. LEGAL ARGUMENT

A. Standard of Review.

GEO urges the Court to analyze the merits of the case, arguing that Plaintiffs cannot maintain a class action because federal law preempts their Minimum Wage Act (MWA) claim. Dkt. No. 95 (Opp.) at 3, 10, and 22. Setting aside the fact that the Court has already rejected GEO’s preemption arguments (Dkt. No. 28; Order Denying GEO’s 1st Mot. to Dismiss), the class certification stage is not the time for a minitrial on the merits. *Amgen Inc. v. Connecticut Ret. Plans & Tr. Funds*, 568 U.S. 455, 466 (2013) (“Rule 23 grants courts no license to engage in free-ranging merits inquiries at the certification stage. Merits questions may be considered to the extent—but only to the extent—that they are relevant to determining whether the Rule 23 prerequisites for class certification are satisfied.”).

¹ In particular, Plaintiffs incorporate all of their opposition to Defendant’s anti-certification motion (Dkt. No. 94), and their opposition to Defendant’s first motion to dismiss concerning federal preemption of the MWA and the plausibility of such a claim (Dkt. No. 15).

1 Here, there are no merits-based issues that weigh against class certification, and
 2 GEO's claims to the contrary only underscore the common, predominant questions to be
 3 resolved by the Court.

4 **B. Common Issues Abound and Predominate.**

5 Common questions are plenty in this case, and they predominate over any questions
 6 affecting individual members of the putative class. GEO unwittingly emphasizes this fact by
 7 describing work authorization as a “threshold matter” to recovery (Opp. at 10). Even if this
 8 were true—*it is not*—the disposition of this “threshold question,” as GEO puts it (Opp. at 3),
 9 is a significant aspect of the case that is capable of resolving the rights of many Voluntary
 10 Work Program (VWP) participants at once. This issue alone is sufficient to satisfy the
 11 Court’s inquiry under Rule 23(a)(2) and (b)(3). *Hanlon v. Chrysler Corp.*, 150 F.3d 1011,
 12 1022 (9th Cir. 1998) (“When common questions present a significant aspect of the case and
 13 they can be resolved for all members of the class in a single adjudication, there is clear
 14 justification for handling the dispute on a representative rather than on an individual basis.”)
 15 (internal quotations omitted)). Plaintiffs also address GEO’s preemption argument in their
 16 opposition to GEO’s anti-certification motion, which Plaintiffs incorporate here. No. 94 at 5-
 17 12.
 18

19 **1. The economic realities test can be applied on a classwide basis.**

20 GEO points to superficial differences between VWP participants to undermine
 21 commonality and predominance, but as Plaintiffs have previously explained, these
 22 differences are immaterial in determining the overarching economic relationship between
 23 GEO and its detainee workforce. Dkt. No. 94 at 12-14.
 24

1 GEO offers a slightly new wrinkle to this argument in its opposition to the instant
 2 motion, arguing that because VWP participants hold different job classifications, Plaintiffs
 3 cannot “prove that participation in each task under each classification constitutes
 4 ‘employment.’” Opp. at 12. This argument, however, demonstrates a fundamental
 5 misunderstanding of the “economic realities” test adopted by Washington courts, under
 6 which the principle inquiry is whether the detainee workers are economically dependent on
 7 GEO or in business for themselves. *Anfinson v. FedEx Ground Package Sys., Inc.*, 281 P.3d
 8 289, 299 (Wash. 2012). The factors considered in answering this question speak to the actual
 9 nature of the relationship between the parties; thus, it makes no difference whether a detainee
 10 was assigned to cleaning the bathrooms or the kitchen, as GEO’s authority to make job
 11 assignments, control job performance, and set the rate of pay, among other indicia of
 12 dependence, remain the same regardless of the individual job assignments. *See id.* at 298-
 13 299. Put another way, GEO’s degree of control and the detainees’ dependence remain
 14 constant—however broad or narrow—across the different job assignments at NWDC, and
 15 GEO has offered no evidence indicating otherwise.

16 GEO also accuses Plaintiffs of “conveniently omit[ting] one relevant factor identified
 17 in *Anfinson*—the parties beliefs about the nature of their relationship” (Opp. at 13), but it is in
 18 fact GEO that misrepresents the holding of the case. The Washington Supreme Court, in
 19 affirming the Court of Appeals, *rejected* the subjective belief of the parties as a relevant
 20 inquiry under the economic realities test. *Anfinson*, 281 P.3d at 299-300. The Court of
 21 Appeals’ opinion in *Anfinson* provides the clearest statement on this issue, as the court
 22 considered and rejected the eight-factor jury instruction proposed by the defendant and given
 23 by the trial court. *Anfinson v. FedEx Ground Package Sys., Inc.*, 244 P.3d 32, 41-43 (Wash.
 24

1 Ct. App. 2010), *aff'd*, 281 P.3d 289 (Wash. 2012). The method of payment and subjective
 2 belief of the parties about the nature of the employment relationship were the seventh and
 3 eight factors, but the appellate court found their inclusion to be erroneous as “neither … is
 4 considered in the economic realities test.” *Id.* at 42 (2010).

5 Finally, GEO’s claim that Plaintiffs offer no proof of a uniform program is easily
 6 belied by the evidence adduced to date—namely, the detainee handbook, the PBNDS, GEO’s
 7 contract with ICE, the declarations of the named plaintiffs, and even the declaration of
 8 NWDC’s associate warden Ryan Kimble (Dkt. No. 97), which all describe uniform policies
 9 and a common scheme for managing detainee labor within the VWP. Plaintiffs expect to
 10 learn more about GEO’s specific practices as discovery continues, but enough information
 11 has come to light on which to rest a finding that the requirements of Rule 23(a)(2) and (b)(3)
 12 have been met. *See Gonzales v. Arrow Fin. Servs. LLC*, 489 F. Supp. 2d 1140, 1154 (S.D.
 13 Cal. 2007), *aff'd*, 660 F.3d 1055 (9th Cir. 2011) (“[D]oubts regarding the propriety of class
 14 certification should be resolved in favor of certification.” (internal quotations omitted)).

17 **2. Individualized inquiries about damages do not undercut the**
 18 **Court’s commonality and predominance considerations.**

19 GEO argues that individual damage assessments predominate over common questions
 20 of liability, thus rendering class certification inappropriate (Opp. at 14-18), but courts “in
 21 every circuit have uniformly held that the 23(b)(3) predominance requirement is satisfied
 22 despite the need to make individualized damage determinations and a recent dissenting
 23 decision of four Supreme Court Justices characterized the point as ‘well nigh universal.’”² 2
 24 W. Rubenstein, *Newberg on Class Actions* § 4:54 (5th ed.) (collecting cases). This is
 25 especially true in wage and hour class actions in which individual damage calculations are
 26 often formulaic and based on representative evidence. *See Leyva v. Medline Indus. Inc.*, 716

1 F.3d 510, 513-14 (9th Cir. 2013) (“The only individualized factor that the district court
 2 identified was the amount of pay owed. In this circuit, however, damage calculations alone
 3 cannot defeat certification.” (internal quotations omitted)); *see also Yokoyama v. Midland*
 4 *Nat'l Life Ins. Co.*, 594 F.3d 1087, 1094 (9th Cir. 2010) (“[T]he amount of damages is
 5 invariably an individual question and does not defeat class action treatment.”). GEO’s
 6 protests otherwise are unconvincing.
 7

8 First, assuming *arguendo* that GEO lacks records by which to determine the precise
 9 number of hours worked—a fact that is far from certain given GEO’s resistance to class
 10 discovery²—class members are entitled to a “just and reasonable inference” about the amount
 11 and extent of work performed upon a showing that they were improperly compensated.
 12 *Anderson v. Mt. Clemens Pottery Co.*, 328 U.S. 680, 687 (1946). This is so because when an
 13 employer violates its statutory duty to keep proper records, and employees thereby have no
 14 way to establish the time spent doing uncompensated work, the “remedial nature of [the
 15 FLSA] and the great public policy which it embodies … militate against making” the burden
 16 of proving uncompensated work “an impossible hurdle for the employee.” *Id.* at 687. Instead,
 17 the burden shifts “to the employer to come forward with evidence of the precise amount of
 18 work performed or with evidence to negative the reasonableness of the inference to be drawn
 19 from the employee’s evidence.” *Id.* at 687-688. Plaintiffs will undoubtedly carry this burden
 20 if the MWA is found to apply to the detainee workers, as there is no dispute that VWP
 21 participates received the subminimum wage of \$1 per day.
 22
 23

26 ² For example, GEO may possess or maintain schedules, assignment sheets, sign-in/out sheets, and
 payroll records that could reveal the number of hours worked and jobs performed or at least the days
 on which a given VWP participant worked.

1 Second, it is not necessary for each class member to testify about their hours worked
 2 or back wages owed to satisfy the damages inquiry because representative testimony from a
 3 subset of class members about the amount of time it took to accomplish particular tasks will
 4 suffice. *See, e.g., Tyson Foods, Inc. v. Bouaphakeo*, 136 S. Ct. 1036, 1046-47, 194 L. Ed. 2d
 5 124 (2016) (citing *Mt. Clemens*, 328 U.S. at 687-88); *Reich v. S. New England Telecomms.*
 6 *Corp.*, 121 F.3d 58, 66-68 (2nd Cir. 1997) (representative testimony of 39 of approximately
 7 1,500 employees was adequate to support an award of back wages for all of the employees);
 8 *Donovan v. New Floridian Hotel, Inc.*, 676 F.2d 468, 472-73 (11th Cir. 1982) (23 employees
 9 testified; back wages awarded to 207 employees); *Brennan v. Gen. Motors Acceptance*
 10 *Corp.*, 482 F.2d 825, 829 (5th Cir. 1973); *McLaughlin v. DialAmerica Mktg., Inc.*, 716
 11 F.Supp. 812, 824-25 (D.N.J. 1989) (testimony of 43 witnesses confirmed existence of
 12 violations for approximately 350 non-testifying employees); *Donovan v. Kaszycki & Sons*
 13 *Contractors, Inc.*, 599 F. Supp. 860, 868 (S.D.N.Y. 1984) (29 employees testified by
 14 deposition; backwages awarded to over 200 employees).

17 The Supreme Court endorsed the use of representative proof from sampling to
 18 demonstrate the predominance of common issues in *Tyson Foods*, 136 S. Ct. at 1046-47. At
 19 issue was the defendant employer's failure to pay overtime wages to a putative class of
 20 employees for donning and doffing protective gear. *Id.* at 1042-45. Because the employer did
 21 not maintain time records for the activity at issue, the employees relied upon an expert
 22 witness's study, which estimated average donning-and-doffing times for certain groups of
 23 employees based on his videotaped observations, to show that some members of the putative
 24 class had worked compensable yet uncompensated overtime hours. *Id.* at 1043-44. In
 25 approving this model of proof, the Court held that employee-specific inquiries were
 26

1 unnecessary and would not lead to the conclusion that individualized issues predominated
 2 over the common question of whether donning-and-doffing time was compensable under the
 3 law. *Id.* at 1046.

4 Here, the putative class may rely upon representative testimony about how long
 5 various tasks took to complete, such as cleaning the dayroom or the bathrooms within the
 6 pods. Or, like the putative class in *Tyson Foods*, Plaintiffs may rely upon video observation,
 7 time motion studies, and electronic entry system records to create statistical evidence
 8 concerning damages obviating the need for individualized inquiry. Under either scenario, the
 9 putative class will proffer evidence sufficient to trigger a “just and reasonable inference”
 10 under *Mt. Clemens*.

12 Third, even if GEO’s records, or lack thereof, prevented the parties from precisely
 13 ascertaining damages for individual VWP participants, Plaintiffs may still establish a
 14 common, predominant issue on damages by showing the aggregate damage suffered by the
 15 class. *Torres v. Mercer Canyons Inc.*, 835 F.3d 1125, 1140, 95 Fed. R. Serv. 3d 1022 (9th
 16 Cir. 2016) (holding, in the certification context, that a “method of establishing liability for
 17 underpayment in the aggregate is a permissible means of proceeding” and noting that where
 18 the defendant “has allegedly failed to keep adequate accounting records specific to each
 19 employee, class members may be compelled to resort to an aggregate method of proving
 20 wage underpayment.”). Plaintiffs can establish aggregate damages—GEO’s total liability to
 21 the class—by calculating how long it would take to do *all* of the VWP jobs on a given day or
 22 within a given week, and extrapolate to determine GEO’s total liability and each class
 23 members’ proportionate share of damages.

1 GEO relies upon *Babineau v. Fed. Express Corp.*, 576 F.3d 1183 (11th Cir. 2009) and
 2 *Comcast Corp. v. Behrend*, 569 U.S. 27 (2013) to argue against the weight of the
 3 aforementioned authority, but these cases are easily distinguished. In *Babineau*, a broad class
 4 of hourly employees alleged state law claims for breach of contract and quantum meruit. The
 5 breach of contract claim rested on allegations that the plaintiffs performed unpaid work
 6 during breaks and were encouraged, as a matter of policy, to arrive early or stay late, and did
 7 not receive payment for so called “gap periods” (time intervals between their manual punch
 8 in or out times and their scheduled start or end time). The Eleventh Circuit held that
 9 certifying the claims was improper under Rule 23(b)(3) because individualized factual
 10 inquiries about whether employees actually worked without compensation for gap periods
 11 and breaks would “swamp” any issues that were common to the proposed class. 576 F3d. at
 12 1191-95. In other words, individualized inquiries predominated over common questions with
 13 respect to liability, not damages, and weighed heavily against certification. *Id.*

16 Unlike *Babineau*, in which denial of class certification turned on employee-specific
 17 questions about liability, class certification is warranted here because the central question
 18 concerning liability—whether VWP participants were GEO’s employees within the meaning
 19 of the MWA—predominates over individual inquiries. Any individualized questions about
 20 damages can be resolved by the means discussed above.

22 GEO’s reliance upon *Comcast* is similarly misplaced. In *Comcast*, the plaintiffs,
 23 alleging antitrust violations, had identified four practices they claimed created anti-
 24 competitive pricing in the relevant market and had introduced an expert’s report setting forth
 25 a methodology for measuring damages on a classwide basis. 569 U.S. at 29-32. The trial
 26 court held that only one of the four practices could give rise to classswide liability in the

1 case, and found the expert’s damages model to still be relevant because its methodology did
 2 not depend on the presence of all four of the challenged practices. *Id.* The Supreme Court
 3 reversed the trial court’s finding, holding that the plaintiffs’ damages model was based on all
 4 four challenged practices rather than tethered specifically to the one that the district court had
 5 accepted, and thus, that the “model f[ell] far short of establishing that damages [were]
 6 capable of measurement on a classwide basis.” *Id.* at 34. In other words, the problem in
 7 *Comcast* was a mismatch between the plaintiffs’ certified liability theory and their damages
 8 model.

10 Here, by contrast, Plaintiff’s theory about liability is perfectly congruent with the
 11 damages sought—payment of all hours worked at the statutory minimum wage rate.
 12

13 **3. GEO asks the Court to consider factors outside the economic
 realities test.**

14 GEO repeatedly argues that the VWP was created to reduce detainees’
 15 “idle time” and that the program lacks any “quality-control and efficiency measures” (Opp. at
 16 16-18, 19-20), but the facts underpinning these arguments, not to mention the legal import of
 17 these assertions, remain unclear. To start, neither the motivation behind working nor quality
 18 and efficiency of the work performed are factors under the economic realities test. Indeed,
 19 the employer’s motivation behind offering work and the employee’s subjective reason for
 20 working—whether it be to stave off boredom or to buy more and better food, hygiene items,
 21 and to pay for phone calls with family, as was the case with Mr. Nwauzor and Mr. Aguirre-
 22 Urbina—make no difference in assessing whether an employee should be paid for the work
 23 actually performed. *See* Nwauzor Decl. (Dkt. No. 88) at ¶7; Aguirre-Urbina Decl. (Dkt. No.
 24 89) at ¶6. The same is true of slow or “bad” work—it is still work for which employees are
 25 entitled to be paid. In any event, as Plaintiffs’ argue in their opposition to GEO’s anti-

1 certification motion, GEO's recourse for unsatisfactory work was to "fire" VWP participants
 2 in underperforming roles or to reassign them elsewhere. *See* Dkt. No. 94 at 13.

3 Moreover, Plaintiffs will rely on representative evidence and perhaps statistical or
 4 time-motion evidence to determine the length of time needed to complete any given job; this
 5 approach to damages will eliminate any concerns about "overcompensating" workers who
 6 worked inefficiently.
 7

8 Finally, to the extent quality-control and efficiency are relevant considerations, they
 9 are common considerations that further demonstrate this action's suitability for class
 10 certification.

11 **C. GEO's Argument Against Superiority is Premised on its Faulty Claims
 12 About Commonality and Predominance.**

13 GEO's argument about superiority rests on the same faulty proposition as its
 14 commonality and predominance argument: individualized issues about damages preclude
 15 certification. Plaintiffs address this assertion in Section II.B, above. The fact remains that,
 16 given the number of potential class members, their relative lack of resources, access to
 17 counsel, and the multitude of common issues, that a class action is the superior means to
 18 fairly and efficiently adjudicate this case. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3).
 19

20 **D. GEO's Argument Against Typicality Is Impermissibly Based Upon The
 21 Merits of Plaintiffs' Claim.**

22 GEO's argument against typicality relies on the same faulty arguments about
 23 preemption addressed above in Section II.B, and in Plaintiff's opposition to GEO's anti-
 24 certification motion. Like all members of the putative class, Mr. Nwauzor and Mr. Aguirre-
 25 Urbina participated in the VWP and received less than the statutory minimum wage for their
 26

1 work. They suffered the same injuries as other class members and are subject to the same
 2 defenses by GEO. In this way, their claims are typical of the class they seek to represent.

3 **E. Plaintiff Aguirre-Urbina Will Fairly and Adequately Represent the Class.**

4 GEO takes several comments made by Mr. Aguirre-Urbina during his deposition out
 5 of context to argue that he is an inadequate class representative because “he has admitted that
 6 he does not particularly care about the only issue in this case.” Opp. at 23. This is a specious
 7 argument, as the transcript from his deposition is rife with references to recovering
 8 backwages on behalf of himself and others. *See, e.g.*, Aguirre-Urbina Tr. (Dkt. No. 87-8) at
 9 32:15-17 (“The purpose of today? The purpose of today is, I believe, that because I am in a
 10 civil detention, that I deserve to be paid at least minimum wage.”); 33:16-17 (“My main
 11 purpose would be to make a difference. So I would like to make a difference for others like
 12 me.”); 186:15-16 (“I think I should get paid more. To me, I’m an employee here.”); 274:3-6
 13 (“As I stated, what I want to see is change and equality. To me, as I said, this is a civil
 14 detention. It is not a jail. There needs to be change, and we need to be paid a minimum
 15 wage.”). Clearly, Mr. Aguirre-Urbina understands the basic claim of the case and his
 16 obligation to other class members and is prepared to do what is necessary to prosecute the
 17 claim for the class.

18 **F. GEO’s Argument Against Numerosity Conflicts With Its Arguments
 19 Against Commonality, Predominance, and Superiority.**

20 GEO steadfastly refuses to acknowledge the numerosity of the putative class. This is
 21 true even as GEO argues essentially that the vastness of the putative class and alleged
 22 individualized concerns make a finding of commonality, predominance, and superiority
 23 impossible. GEO has not and cannot reconcile these divergent positions, as the requirements
 24 of Rule 23(a)(1) are easily met here.

1 **G. *Menocal* is Persuasive Authority.**

2 GEO argues against the persuasiveness of the Tenth Circuit's decision in *Menocal*,
 3 claiming that the district court had already dismissed the plaintiffs' minimum wage claim
 4 because the VWP participants were not employees. Opp. at 24. While this is true, the
 5 grounds for dismissal are clearly distinguishable as the district court in *Menocal* analyzed the
 6 Colorado Minimum Wage Order, which had been previously interpreted to exempt inmates
 7 and prisoners from coverage. 113 F. Supp. 3d 1125, 1129 (D. Colo. 2015). Moreover, the
 8 court found that GEO was not an employer within the meaning of the Colorado statute
 9 because it did not fall into any of the four industries to which the law applied. *Id.* at 1129-31.
 10 No such carve outs to coverage apply to civil immigration detainees under the Washington
 11 MWA. *See* Dkt. No. 28 at 14 (Order Denying Def.'s 1st Mot. to Dismiss; "At least based on
 12 the pleadings, it is plausible that the Plaintiff, arguably, comes within the State definition of
 13 "employee," and is not subject to any existing statutory exception."). The fact that this Court
 14 correctly distinguished *Menocal*'s ruling on the merits of the two different state minimum
 15 wage act claims does not make the Tenth Circuit's affirmation of class certification any less
 16 persuasive here.

17 **III. CONCLUSION**

18 Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court grant their motion to certify this matter as
 19 a class action.

20 DATED this 13th day of July, 2018.

21 SCHROETER GOLDMARK & BENDER

22 _____
 23 s/ *Jamal N. Whitehead*

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on July 13, 2018, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system, which will send notification of such filing to the following:

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